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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR HONORS COURAGEOUS TANZANIAN ALBINOS AFTER
GRUESOME YEAR OF MURDERS

¶11. (U) SUMMARY: Following a year in which several dozen albinos were reported murdered throughout Tanzania, Ambassador Mark Green awarded the entire albinism community with Post's "Martin Luther King Jr. Drum Major for Justice Award." The award, presented annually the last ten years commemorating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., recognizes Tanzanians who have waged a peaceful battle for justice in the spirit of Dr. King. The event was the lead story January 15 on all major television and nine top radio stations, and was carried prominently in at least ten English and Swahili dailies the following day. After the event, government leaders pledged continued action in raising awareness of the issue. A group from a U.S. university committed funds to support Albino groups. We are encouraging submission of relevant proposals to our Democracy and Human Rights Fund. Activists intend to present the issue of Tanzanian albino murders, especially the lack of prosecutions for these crimes, to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in New York on February 5.
END SUMMARY.

Traditional Healers' Claims of Riches Threatens Albinos

¶12. (U) Although there were unofficial reports of several dozens of persons with albinism murdered across the country during 2008, 26--mostly women and children--were confirmed killed, and numerous others were mutilated, in the misguided belief that the body parts of albinos could be used to create wealth or bring protection and good luck in business or love. Many murders occurred in the Great Lakes Zone of Northern Tanzania. While the practice is reportedly associated with the spells of witchdoctors or traditional healers, many believe that the practice is a modern development rather than a traditional belief. Some Tanzanians believe that albinos are not humans and refer to them as "zeru zeru," a derogatory Kiswahili word for ghosts. Others believe that albinos cannot be killed but simply 'disappear.' Fishermen, especially around Lake Victoria, have been reported to tie strands of albinos' hair to their fishing nets to ensure a plentiful catch. Thieves have stolen albino remains from graves to create talismans.

¶13. (U) When entire bodies cannot be obtained, attackers have hacked off albinos' arms and/or legs, often resulting in the victims' death. Because of the stigma associated with albinism, albinos are poorer than average in one of the already poorest countries in the world. With limited financial means to purchase sun block, Tanzanians with albinism suffer high rates of melanoma. Because of

associated vision problems, as well as stigmatization and fear, many albinos do not finish high school and are illiterate. There are more than 8,000 registered albinos in Tanzania, but the Tanzania Albino Society estimates there are between 100,000 and 200,000 albinos in the country. In response to the dramatic upswing in the murder of albinos, Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete appointed albino Al Shaymaa Kwegyir as a 'Special Seats' Member of Parliament in April 2008 to focus on disabled citizens. In recent months, the trade in albino body parts has reportedly spread to Burundi and the DRC: a Tanzanian was arrested in November reportedly trying to sell his albino wife to Congolese traders for \$3000. There have been arrests, but so far no convictions in these murders.

Brave Journalist Goes Undercover to Expose the Deadly Trade

¶ 14. (SBU) In July 2008, Tanzanian BBC World Service Bureau Chief Vicky Ntetema went undercover, with police consent, posing as a businesswoman looking to buy charmed potions from ten different witchdoctors. Ntetema told PDO, and reported through BBC, that she was offered potions made from albino organs for a starting price of \$2000 from several witchdoctors. Ntetema exposed the offers, as well as subsequent police inaction to make arrests, through reports on BBC. Ntetema disclosed to PDO that the Minister of Home Affairs Lawrence Masha berated her publicly for "bringing shame on Tanzania" through her international reports. (Note: Masha, a close friend of the embassy, declined our invitation to attend the MLK event. End Note.) Ntetema temporarily has relocated to Nairobi, as she has been told that she is now "overqualified" to work as a journalist in Tanzania. After the increase in murders in 2008, the Tanzania Albino Society and other NGOs have organized marches, fielded an albino soccer team that played against MPs, and garnered considerable media coverage for the cause.

Ambassador calls for action during moving ceremony

¶ 15. (U) The MLK Drum Major for Justice Award ceremony, held annually since 1999, honors prominent Tanzanian leaders involved in advancing social justice. In his remarks, the Ambassador called on Tanzanian law enforcement to arrest and prosecute those responsible for the murders of albinos, stating, "As a friend of Tanzania, I will not allow the United States to remain silent in the face of a grave abuse of human rights occurring in Tanzania today." Ambassador drew parallels between the peaceful marches of the Civil Rights Movement and the peaceful marches for justice being organized by the Albino Society.

¶ 16. (U) Margareth Sitta, Minister of Community Development, Gender, and Children, who attended the ceremony, spoke to the media assembled praising the U.S. Government for its efforts to help in this important fight, and announced the creation of a task force on the issue. Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Anna Makinda, also attended the event. Media mogul Reginald Mengi, a dedicated champion for disabled Tanzanians and the 2008 MLK award recipient, helped hand over the award. Special MP Kwegyir, who spoke at the event, applauded U.S. efforts to make the issue known throughout the world. Representatives of the Tanzania Albino Society Ernest Kimaya and Josephat Torner, and Ntetema from BBC spoke and read excerpts of Dr. King's speeches during the ceremony. A local gospel choir brought several albinos in the audience to tears with a song dedicated to ending the murders of albinos, emotion which was captured in numerous media photo essays.

Significant Media Coverage

¶ 17. (U) Coverage of the ceremony was carried at the top of all national television news reports the evening of January 15. Detailed stories and photos were carried prominently in January 16th editions of Kiswahili dailies Habari Leo, Uhuru, Kulikoni, and Nipashe and in English dailies The Guardian, This Day, The African, Daily News and The Citizen. Additionally, television stations ITV, TBC and TBC1, and radio stations Radio Free Africa/StarTV, Clouds FM, Radio One, East Africa Radio, and Islamic stations Radio Koran,

and Radio Kheri carried the story in their morning "newspaper review" programs. Coverage was factual and positive, quoting the Ambassador's remarks at length, and included extensive positive comments from VIPs who attended the ceremony.

Next Steps

¶8. (U) We have received a proposal to support a sensitization campaign in northwestern Tanzania, and is seeking additional proposals for our Democracy and Human Rights Fund grants program. A timely visit from a service learning-study tour of students from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse has resulted in their commitment of a monetary donation to support the albinism community. BBC journalist Ntetema, along with the head of Canadian NGO "Under the Same Sun," intends to present an overview of albino murders in Tanzania supported by the results from an October 2008 fact-finding mission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in New York on February 5.

Green